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ABSTRACT

Three key considerations (What is organizational development (OD)? Why do organizations undertake OD efforts? What are the critical phases (and their pitfalls) that make up the OD effort?) are discussed in this paper. The sections include: "What is OD," which presents three definitions of OD and the goals of OD as identified by Bennis; "Why Do Organizations Undertake OD Programs?" which discusses the reasons why organizations undertake OD efforts to help them survive in a competitive business world; "Organizational Diagnosis: Perspectives and Pitfalls," which discusses the importance of accurate diagnosis in regard to what the organization is like, what its problems are, and how they may be related, and presents a basic model underlying OD, which is an extension of the Likert model as refined by Hain; "Organizational Change," which looks at research related to specific factors related to successful change efforts, a six-phase change program, and a model to be applied to change intervention; and "Evaluation Phase," which discusses a communication index developed to demonstrate the relationship between communication quality and organizational performance. (WR)

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ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN DIAGNOSIS, CHANGE, AND EVALUATION

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ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN DIAGNOSIS, CHANGE, AND EVALUATION

Organizational change of one kind or another is, of course, inevitable. However, more than ever, organizational change is purposely undertaken. But this does not guarantee that the changes made will be for the better, for many factors moderate the success or failure of change efforts. In correct diagnosis or change strategies based on "fads" may turn out to be counter-productive. Moreover, changing an organization around to increase its viability and strength does not begin with merely drawing up a new organizational chart. The researcher or consultant who wishes to make "waves" down through the system must become attuned to the critical conditions or motives for why the organization wants or needs to change, plus the processes (diagnosis, change strategy, and evaluation) which make up the change or organizational development effort.

Our experience -- one of us as a communicologist specializing in the interpersonal relations aspect of organizational development (O.D.) and the other as an organizational psychologist focusing on organizational change -- suggests that there are a number of key considerations that must be kept in mind when organizational change and development is contemplated.

In this article, we would like to address ourselves to the following key considerations: What is O.D.?, Why do organizations undertake O.D. efforts?, and What are the critical phases (and their pitfalls) that make up the O.D. effort?

What is O.D.?

Organizational development (O.D.) has been variously defined as the following would indicate:

> Organization development (O.D.) is a response to change, a complex educational strategy intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values and structure of organizations so that they can better adapt to new technologies, markets, and challenges, and the dizzying rate of change itself (Bennis, 1969).

> Using knowledge and techniques from the behavioral sciences, organization development (O.D.) is a process which attempts to increase organizational effectiveness by integrating individual desires for growth and development with organizational goals. Typically, this process is a planned change effort which involves a total system over a period of time, and these change efforts are related to the organization's mission (Tannenbaum and Davis, 1970).

> A planned and systematic approach to organizational assessment and organizational change, proceeding from a broad and flexible view of organizational behavior, with the primary goal being to improve the processes by which the business functions and to alter those human and technical features which limit the organization and its employes from achieving their full potential (Landen, 1971).

Organizational development is in its infancy compared to other areas of study in the behavioral sciences. However, there appears to be some consistency in the direction if not in the focus of this activity. Bennis (1969) identifies these goals:

Goals of Organization Development

1. To create an open, problem-solving climate throughout an organization.
2. To supplement the authority associated with role or status with the authority of knowledge and competence.
3. To locate decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities as close to the information sources as possible.
4. To build trust among persons and groups throughout an organization.
5. To make competition more relevant to work goals and to maximize collaborative efforts.
6. To develop a reward system which recognizes both the achievement of the organization's goals (profits or service) and development of people.
7. To increase the sense of 'ownership' of organization objectives throughout the work force.
8. To help managers to manage according to relevant objectives rather than according to 'past practices' or according to objectives which do not make sense for one's area of responsibility.
9. To increase self-control and self-direction for people within the organization. (pgs. 36-37)

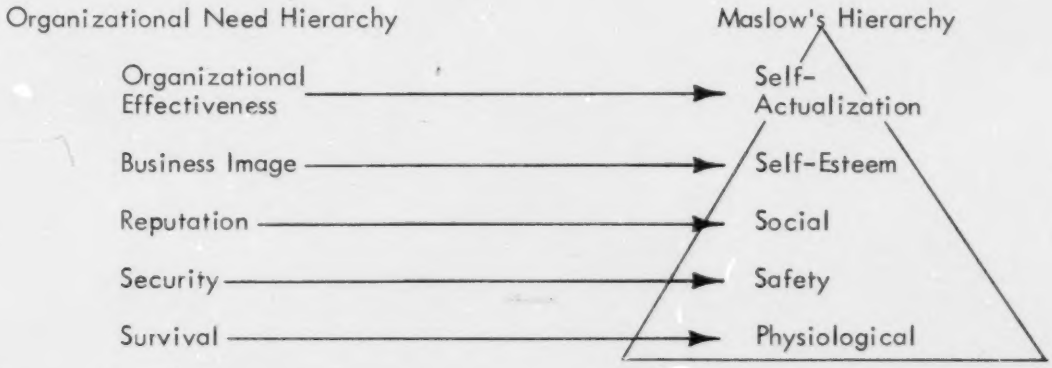
With these goals in mind, the process of organizational development becomes the issue under dispute.

Why Do Organizations Undertake O.D. Programs?

To change organizations successfully requires well-organized thinking about the whole change process, beginning with the question of why an organization "wants to change." Our experiences with organizations has taught us that one of the first things a consultant must gain information on is -- Why is the organization considering O.D.? It is a common mistake to think that the pressures for O.D. or planned change stem always from an uncomfortable or

painful situation. It is important for the consultant to understand that when groups or organizations undertake planned change, they do so for many different needs, conditions, and motives. The consultant, once again, must have a clear and accurate idea of the motivational base influencing the organization's decision to consider O.D.

Let us take a look at some of the primary reasons why organizations consider planned change or O.D. These reasons are best seen in terms of a need hierarchy -- much in the same way as individual human motives can be described by Maslow's Need Hierarchy.



The most basic reason why organizations undertake O.D. efforts is to help them survive in a competitive business world. These organizations typically have suffered from chronically poor productivity which is a result of costly labor relations or other personnel problems. Hence, these organizations seek to improve their productive capbility by eliminating or solving the "people problems" that interfere with successful performance.

Moving up the hierarchy, we find many organizations not so much concerned with immediate survival, but more concerned with their long-term security. These organizations are cognizant of the important role that employes play in organizational performance and undertake O.D. efforts as a means of preventing future problems. That is, they seek to invest in the "human organization" and its future through O.D., much in the same way they invest in the maintenance of the equipment with which they work.

Another reason -- moving up still one more rung of the hierarchy -- is a desire to maintain or achieve a certain reputation or recognization in the industry. This reason is typically manifested by a desire to cultivate or maintain the reputation of being a progressive, innovative firm -- continually interested in newer and better ways of doing things.

The fourth reason -- one that is only beginning to surface -- is best described as a desire for corporate esteem. Increasingly in these days of pressures upon industry for social involvement, organizations are planning to meet societal needs. No longer, for many organizations is the profit motive the single criterion for business success, but rather that of profit and social service. In this sense, organizations undertake O.D. to help them better meet the needs of society. Or as one top manager remarked, "You must be good (with respect to profit) to do good (with respect to society)."

The final reason is the organization's desire to become the best that it is capable of being, or to improve its organizational effectiveness. Argyris (1970) defines this as " . . . its capacity to . . . adapt, maintain itself, and grow, regardless of the particular functions it fulfills (pg. 118)." A number of our client organizations have been very successful and profitable, but seek to improve with the objective of becoming even better. In these cases, organizations undertake O.D. to help them self-actualize.

The critical point, however, which needs to be recognized by the researcher or consultant is that organizations undertake planned development programs for a number of different reasons, only some of which stem from negative or painful conditions.

What Are The Critical Phases That Make Up O.D.?

Organizational Diagnosis: Perspectives and Pitfalls

In our opinion the critical skill in O.D. is diagnosis; that is, getting a valid and reliable indication of what the organization is like, what its problems are, and how they may be related. For unless the consultant has made an accurate diagnosis, the next phase -- the change procedure -- will undoubtedly be inappropriate. Much like the physician, if the O.D. specialist makes a faulty diagnosis, his recommended treatment strategy will be inappropriate to the real problem.

Extending the medical analogy, let us suppose that a physician treated his clients in the following manner: everyone on Monday received aspirin, Tuesday everyone received a blood test, and on Wednesday everyone received a rectal exam. This procedure, obviously, would make very little medical sense. Yet, when it comes to organizational development, many organizational consultants are not at all adverse to saying that everyone in the organization gets treatment "X" (T-groups), or everyone gets treatment "Y" or "C" regardless of their problems. It is imperative to realize that different kinds of situations and problems call for different kinds of treatments and solutions, and the important step in making sure that the treatment or change process is relevant to the real problem is that of making an accurate and complete diagnosis of the problem.

Another common problem associated with the diagnostic phase is that, oftentimes, no diagnosis is made at all. This situation is most clearly illustrated by those organizations which respond to currant fads. Take the example of a firm which has adopted an O.D. program that is widely marketed (e.g., transactional analysis). The program looks good on the surface and is adopted largely because a competitor is using it. In our opinion, this is similar to taking your neighbor's medicine because you think his condition resembles yours. This sort of "treatment trading" should be discouraged as much in organizations as it is in medicine.

Up to this point, we have tried to show some of the common pitfalls associated with the diagnostic phase. What, then, are some recommended techniques or methodologies that would avoid the above problems? Let us now discuss a procedure we have used which avoids the above-mentioned pitfalls and which yields a valid and reliable "picture" of organizational problems.

Our recommended diagnostic procedure stems from the rationale provided by the causal sequence (see Figure 1 below) and is grounded on the assumption that planned development should not be undertaken without measurement that is precise, accurate, conceptually sound and relevant.

The basic model underlying our O.D. efforts is an extension of the Likert (1967) model as refined by Hain (1972).

External Causal Variables →	Internal Causal Variables →	Intervening Variables →	End-Result Variables
Market and Economic	Leadership	Communication	
Legal-Political	Organizational Structure	Coordination	Satisfaction Absenteeism Turnover Grievances
Socio-Cultural	Technology Organizational Climate	Motivation Decision-Making	Productivity

Time →

Figure 1. Hain's Causal Sequence

Each of the four variables shown in Figure 1 on the previous page is defined as follows:

> External Causal Variables are independent variables operating outside the province of the organization, but which have a powerful influence on organizational performance. It is important to note that these variables cannot be directly altered or changed by management.
>
> Internal Causal Variables are also independent variables which determine organizational performance. However, these variables can be altered or changed by management. Causal variables include the structure of the organization, technology, management, and organizational climate.
>
> Intervening Variables reflect the internal state and health of the firm as measured by its collective capacity for effective communication, interaction, and decision making.
>
> End-Result Variables are dependent variables which reflect the degree to which an organization is meeting its goals. Job satisfaction is one end-result variable along with absenteeism, grievances, turnover, and productivity.

An important feature of the model on the previous page is the importance of time and direction of influence. That is, by manipulating causal variables, a demonstrable change will also take place (following a time lag) in the intervening variables which, in turn, significantly influence the end-result variables. Working from this framework, Hain and Widgery (1973) found that the data supported their two hypotheses that (1) a significant correlation existed between communication effectiveness and employe satisfaction, and (2) that there were significant negative correlations between ratings of supervisory leadership discrepancy and communication effectiveness (where supervisory leadership discrepancy was defined as the difference between subordinates ratings of their actual and their ideal supervisors). An important implication from this study is that communication indices tend to predict other end-result indices (albeit the data are correlations and, therefore, do not prove causality). Repeated measures on these factors have tended to bear out this relationship when the influence of time is taken into consideration.

For a long time, scholars have believed that communication is an important variable in organizational performance (Redding and Sanborn, 1964), but specific research data to that effect has been relatively skimpy. Also, managers that we have talked to, have been skeptical that any type of data concerning communication could actually be related to the profit and loss columns of their financial sheet. By utilizing the organizational diagnostic procedure described in this paper, both problems alluded to previously may be relieved. First, data can be collected and analyzed in a systematic framework which includes communication without excluding other important variables. Second, attitude data can be shown to have a causal relationship to the end results over time. This becomes

a major selling point to management. One final point concerning organizational diagnosis should be made. Only after the data has been collected, compared to normative data, and interpreted in the form of a diagnosis, can the consultant begin to engage in an intervention program to conduct planned organizational change. The change process itself will be discussed in the next section.

Organizational Change

We have recently been actively involved in studying the change process itself. While each client appears to have different specific needs, there are certain specific procedures which appear to be valuable across different client organizations. Our recent research indicates that once a diagnosis has been made, an organizational change program may flourish or may die depending on several identifiable factors (Hain, Richetto, Schwendiman, Tubbs, Widgery, and Zima, 1972; Zima, 1972; Richetto, 1973; Tubbs, 1973a). Hain (1972b) found that three specific factors were associated with successful change efforts. First, was the internal and external pressure to change. Second, was the intervention from a trusted outsider. Third, was a change effort first initiated in a small pilot program (p. 6-7).

Bowers (1972) found that successful change efforts resulted from the use of survey feedback. However, interpersonal process consultation, and task process consultation yielded no significant changes, while laboratory training and data handback were associated with declines in organizational climate (p. 21).

Greiner (1970) found that eleven successful organizational change efforts followed a six-phase program, while unsuccessful change efforts violated the sequence described below:

Phases

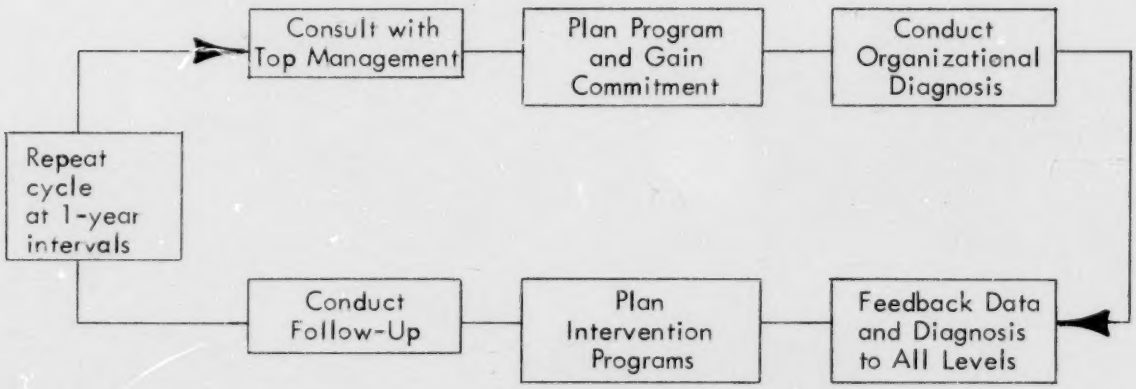
1. Pressure on top management ——→ arousal to take action.
2. Intervention at the top ——→ reorientation to internal problems.
3. Diagnosis of problem areas ——→ recognition of specific problems.
4. Invention of new solutions ——→ commitment to new course of action.
5. Experimentation with new solutions ——→ search for results.
6. Reinforcement from positive results ——→ acceptance of new practices (p. 222).

Greiner also found that the shared power approaches (including group problem solving and group decision making) were more effective in changing an organization than either the

unilateral approaches (including change by decree, by personnel replacement, or by structure) or the delegated authority approaches (including case discussion and T-group sessions). Greiner describes the shared power approaches as follows:

> More toward the middle of the power distribution continuum, as noted earlier, are the shared approaches, where authority is still present and used, yet there is also interaction and sharing of power. This approach to change is utilized in two forms.
>
> By Group Decision Making. Here the problems still tend to be defined unilaterally from above, but lower level groups are usually left free to develop alternative solutions and to choose among them. The main assumption tends to be that individuals develop more commitment to action when they have a voice in the decisions that affect them. The net result is that power is shared between bosses and subordinates, though there is a division of labor between those who define the problems and those who develop the solutions.
>
> By Group Problem Solving. This form emphasizes both the definition and the solution of problems within the context of group discussion. Here power is shared throughout the decision process, but, unlike group decision making, there is an added opportunity for lower level subordinates to define the problem. The assumption underlying this approach is not only that prople gain greater commitment from being exposed to a wider decision-making role, but also that they have significant knowledge to contribute to the definition of the problem. (pg. 217)

Tubbs (1973c) suggests that based on several studies in General Motors Corporation, the following model ought to be applied to any change intervention (pg. 8).


Consult with Top Management
Plan Program and Gain Commitment
Conduct Organizational Diagnosis
Repeat cycle at 1-year intervals
Conduct Follow-Up
Plan Intervention Programs
Feedback Data and Diagnosis to All Levels

The difference between this intervention model and Greiner's is the ongoing cyclical nature of the O.D. process. The last step in the first cycle is to evaluate the results and begin to plan further intervention strategies. The evaluation process is dealt with in the next section.

Evaluation Phase

Equally important to the diagnostic and change phases is the evaluation phase. Each year large investments of money are made for various training and development programs, but managers and training specialists, once again, have very incomplete information as to the effectiveness of these programs, and, more importantly, their contribution to organizational performance. Consequently, many organizations often refuse to spend money on development programs -- programs that may be extremely crucial to the long-term benefit of the plant -- because they cannot perceive a favorable cost/benefit ratio between the program and organizational performance. The essential problem, then, facing the communication consultant is developing a measurement technology for evaluating the differential effectiveness of various O.D. programs. The development of such a measurement technology would provide consultants with information as to the changes taking place in the human organization and the impact of such changes on organizational performance.

In Figure 1 we stated that there is a functional relationship among the variables composing the causal sequence. Acknowledging the possibility of some circularity, a growing number of studies, Likert (1973, 1967); Hain and Widgery (1973); Hain (1972); Seashore and Bowers (1970); Mann, Indik and Vroom (1963); have revealed a substantial causal relationship among the variables included in the model. That is, changes in causal variables produce changes in the intervening variables and, in turn, end-result or performance variables. Moreover, the magnitude of the change in the causal variables is reflected in the size of changes in the intervening and end-result variables -- large changes in the causal variables bring about sizable changes in the other variables. In widely different organizations, Likert (1973) has demonstrated, for instance, that changes in causal and intervening variables can " . . . cause from 30 percent more than 70 percent of the total fluctuations in performance data such as productivity and costs" (pg. 11). This suggests that he has found correlations to range from approximately .55 to .83 between human organizational data (mostly communication related variables) and organizational performance (r^2 = % variation explained).

Further evidence that a functional relationship exists among these variables composing the causal sequence is given in the before-mentioned Hain and Widgery (1973) study. These researchers found the role of communication to play a significant role in the causal sequence, especially as a "leading indicator" of plant performance. They showed communication index (consisting of informational flow and trust items) to be highly related to the end-result variable of job satisfaction (+.68) and also to a leadership discrepancy index (-.76). This finding is important because it suggests that fluctuations in communication

quality within an organization can be significantly associated with future plant performance. Likert and Bowers (1970), conducting a longitudinal study in a large chemical plant, found that the correlations between a communication index and four consecutive monthly performance indices to be -.57, -.58, -.67, and -.68. Such results reveal the impact of time and the importance of monitoring the quality of the communication as a leading indicator of future performance. For if we can establish empirically the relationship between communication quality and organizational performance, and we think we have, then we can begin to use fluctuations in communication quality as a criterion for judging the effectiveness of various O.D. change strategies. This, of course, requires that we can show a demonstrable and significant relationship between communication quality and organizational performance. To demonstrate this relationship, we sought to determine the explicit linear relationship between a communication index consisting of such factors as upward, lateral, and downward communication, and such indicators of organizational performance as absenteeism, grievance rate, and efficiency.

This communication index* was composed of the following seven questions:

Upward Communication

*How receptive are those above you to your ideas and suggestions?

Lateral Communication

*To what extent do persons in your work group keep each other informed about important events and situations?

*To what extent do persons in different departments plan together and coordinate their efforts?

*How are differences and disagreements between units or departments handled in this organization?

Downward Communication

*How are objectives set in this company?

*To what extent are you told what you need to know to do your job in the best possible way?

*To what extent is information widely shared in this company so that those who make decisions have access to all available know-how?

* These items are adapted from Taylor and Bowers, 1970, and were scored on a five-point scale.

The answers from these questions on the previous page were combined additively and correlated against the performance measures of absenteeism, grievances and efficiency. Spearman-Rank difference correlation coefficients* were calculated between the communication index and each of the three measures of performance in a sample of five autonomous departments.** Tables I and II depict these relationships.

Table I

CORRELATION MATRIX

	Absenteeism	Grievances	Efficiency
Communication Index (Correlations)	.60	1.00*	.60

*$p < .01$

Table II

COMPARISON OF DEPARTMENTAL RANKINGS ON FOUR INDICES

Communication Index	Grievances	Absenteeism	Efficiency
1	1	1	2
2	2	2	1
3	3	5	5
4	4	4	3
5	5	3	4

These coefficients reveal, in a very significant fashion, that communication quality is related to organizational performance. Hence, the communication consultant desiring to measure the effectiveness of his O.D. intervention, can compare pre to post measurements of communication quality and, from this assessment, simultaneously determine whether the O.D. intervention has made an impact on the "human organization" and organizational performance (as measured by absenteeism, grievances and efficiency).

* cf. Seigel, 1956, p. 204

** Total sample included 350 individuals.

An important direction that our research has indicated is the necessity and importance of developing a communication forecasting index (CFI) which would systematically link communication to organizational success. Just as economists have developed leading indicators of the economy, we in communication need to develop techniques which reveal the relationship between people variables -- the human assets -- and organizational performance.

Among the expected results from developing a communication forecasting index (CFI) would be:

1. Providing a systematic measurement technology for more effectively evaluating the differential effectiveness of various O.D. and training programs.
2. Providing a leading indicator to increase management's lead time in recognizing performance problems caused by the deterioration of the human organization and its productive capability.
3. Provide a technique for detecting at an early stage any innovating changes taking place in the causal variables -- the methods of administration and organizational practices. The CFI would facilitate more rapid diffusion of these methods to other parts of the organization. In this manner, organizations would be aided in adopting newer and more effective practices which result in higher productivity and performance.

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